

TRUST AND THE CAPTURING OF SCHOOL-BASED POTENTIAL

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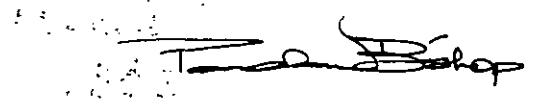
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I certify that this Thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institute, college or university, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the Thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pamela W. Bishop', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pamela W. Bishop

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ABSTRACT

TRUST AND THE CAPTURING OF SCHOOL-BASED POTENTIAL

by Pamela Winsome Bishop

The importance of collegial trust to organisations has long been recognised. In school settings the achievement of trust between principals and teachers can be a vital ingredient in the development of school culture and effectiveness. Yet the nature and rapidity of changes being required of schools, plus the context in which principals and teachers are expected to implement initiatives, may test collegial trust. Despite the challenges which many principals face in the course of their work, some are more trusted by teachers than others.

This study investigated what four principals did or did not do to engender and maintain trust with teachers. As well, the study considered how externally-driven initiatives, which principals were required to implement with teachers, affected mutual trust. An examination of how trustworthy leadership contributed to school culture was also made.

An interpretive multiple-site case study framed the investigation. The researcher spent approximately ten weeks in four inner urban Melbourne secondary schools. During this time, each school's principal was shadowed for four days and interviewed extensively. The balance of the fieldwork consisted of observation, document analysis, and interviews with 112 teachers.

A combination of principals' personal and professional characteristics plus

work practices engendered and maintained trust with teachers. Trusting teachers, being knowledgeable, hardworking, caring, confidential, and having integrity were commonly favoured characteristics that attracted teacher trust. Work practices which engendered trust were non-exploitative, de-emphasised principals' power differentials with teachers, and encouraged controversy and critical dialogue. Teachers' perceptions of trust in their principals were evident along four dimensions: absolute, domain-specific, relational, and comparative.

The extent to which teachers thought their key interests were being advanced or diminished was often the standard which teachers used to determine trust in their principals. That standard came into play especially when principals implemented non-negotiable initiatives with teachers. When teachers consistently perceived trustworthy leadership from the principal which was congruent with the school's culture, mutual trust was enhanced and a strengthening of shared expectations occurred.

Results of this study highlighted principals' trust-engendering characteristics and practices. The study also found that when teachers were unable to discern the need for an externally-imposed key initiative, they often questioned the educational competency of those associated with its development. Such questioning frequently extended to principals who were actively involved in the initiative's implementation even though the rhetoric of much current educational change emphasises devolution and school-based management, and teacher participation in decision making. These findings have implications for the ongoing trust between principals and teachers and the capturing of school-based potential.

To Bill,
for believing in possibility, sovereignty,
and leading by example,
with thanks.

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